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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 ANKARA 003144

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [EAID](#) [ECON](#) [IZ](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: IRAQI TURKMEN GROUPS SQUARE OFF IN TURKEY

REF: A. STATE 99829

[1](#)B. ANKARA 1211

[1](#)C. KIRKUK 75

Classified By: Ambassador Eric S. Edelman for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (U) This is an action request--please see para. 15.

Summary

[1](#)2. (C) There are a number of Iraqi Turkmen groups in Ankara. Three that we have met recently appear to be united only in their anger at what they believe is CF support for Kurdish domination of northern Iraq, especially Kirkuk. One group claimed (several weeks ago) there is no insurgency in the northwest Ninewah city of Talafar, and that the Kurds are duping us so they can gain control of the city. The somewhat more reasonable Iraqi Turkmen Assembly seeks USG assistance for two projects in Kirkuk as well as security support for a pan-Turkmen "summit" later this year; we would welcome the input of our colleagues in Iraq on these requests (see para 15). Despite the Iraqi Turkmen Front's poor showing in the Jan. 30 election, Turkey will not likely cut its support for the party soon. Turkey will use the Turkmen issue as a wedge on Kirkuk. End summary.

[1](#)3. (C) According to Turkmen sources, the Iraqi Turkmen (or Turkomans) came from Central Asia and are descended from Turkic-speaking tribes who began settling in Iraq 1500 years ago. More recently, the Turkmen were favored by the Ottoman Empire when it controlled what became Iraq after World War I. Turkish and the Turkmen language are mutually intelligible. Partly for these historical reasons, and likely also because the Turks seek to balance perceived Kurdish dominance in northern Iraq, the GOT seeks to position itself as a defender of Turkmen interests. (NOTE: However, Turkey said or did little to protest Saddam's mistreatment of the Turkmen during his rule. END NOTE.) A number of Iraqi Turkmen groups have representatives in Turkey and--to varying degrees not entirely transparent to us--enjoy access to high levels in Ankara.

Turkmen Groups: Angry

[1](#)4. (C) Meetings with three different Iraqi Turkmen organizations in Ankara over the past few months reveal the following, at least about the groups represented here:

--Iraq's Turkmen are not united politically.
--The Turkmen are, to varying degrees, angry at Kurdish moves to expand their control in northern Iraq, especially in Kirkuk province.
--This anger to a certain degree spills over to us, as the Turkmen believe we have sided with the Kurds (a view shared by many Turks). This is especially manifested in their view of the Jan. 30 elections, wherein they believe Iraq's Turkmen were disenfranchised.

[1](#)5. (C) The Turkmen with whom we met are all determined to "educate" us about the history of the Iraqi Turkmen and to ensure that we consider them among the main ethnic groups--along with Arabs and Kurds--represented in Iraq. While they profess to be friends of the United States and of the coalition--and to have welcomed the liberation of Iraq--they believe we have been co-opted by Iraq's Kurds, whom they accuse of carrying out both historical and current persecution.

[1](#)6. (C) PolMilOff has met several times in the past 10 months with the Iraqi Turkmen Front (ITF) and the Iraqi Turkmen Cultural and Assistance Association (ITCAA). ITF's ties to the GOT and TGS are well known; we cannot evaluate those of ITCAA. In addition, the Ambassador met Feb. 4 with the Iraqi Turkmen Assembly; PolMilOff has subsequently met with this group.

Cultural Association: Bile...

17. (C) While ITF and ITCAA claim not to be affiliated with each other, they appear to share similar views and an apparent distrust of CF and the Kurds. Both are anxious about CF presence in Talafar, a city with a sizable Turkmen population in northwest Ninewah province which has been infiltrated over time by insurgents, thus drawing a strong CF and ISF presence there. ITCAA members are especially confrontational; they flatly told PolMilOff that there is no insurgency in Talafar, and that the Kurds have duped us into moving forces there so that the Kurds can come in behind us and take over the town. They accused CF of using napalm during September 2004 operations there, and accused former Peshmerga IA units of expelling Turkmen from their homes and taking them over. They insist that CF should withdraw from Talafar to the airport and meet with local leaders there. When PolMilOff recalled that insurgents essentially took control of the city in September 2004 until CF arrived in larger numbers, our interlocutors insisted that there is no insurgency in Talafar.

18. (C) ITCAA representatives recited familiar Turkmen concerns about Kirkuk, many of which reflect the views of the GOT. They claimed that 300,000 Kurds moved into Kirkuk Governorate after April 2003, and that the Kurds also carried out mass fraud to dominate the Jan. 30 provincial elections. PolMilOff explained that Article 58 of the TAL dictates that the future of Kirkuk will be decided through a national political and constitutional process, not merely by the wishes of the Kirkuk Governorate Council. After a difficult two and a half hour back-and-forth with ITCAA, its leader, Mahmut Kasapoglu, closed by stating that the U.S. and much of the world viewed Saddam Hussein positively until the Halabja chemical weapons attack in 1988; he then asked when the U.S. will come to the same realization about Iraq's Kurds and Shia.

...Iraqi Turkmen Front: Guile...

19. (C) The ITF's Ankara representative, Ahmet Muratli, is generally more diplomatic than Kasapoglu, but no less determined to persuade us that we have been duped by the Kurds into oppressing the Turkmen. Muratli frequently contacts us to ask about the status of ITF members allegedly detained by CF, the ISF, or Peshmerga and he also passes on (usually incorrect or exaggerated) press accounts of actions against Turkmen. At the same time, Muratli insists that the ITF supported OIF and was disappointed when the Turkish parliament rejected the use of Turkey to enter Iraq in March 2003, neither of which is the case as far as we know.

110. (C) Muratli acknowledges that the ITF failed to unite Iraq's Turkmen under one banner in the Jan. 30 elections, though he also argues that fraud and intimidation served to largely disenfranchise many Turkmen. GOT leaders roundly criticized the ITF for its poor performance in the January elections (see ref a), and the Turkish press reported on the ITF's apparently failed recent Congress in Kirkuk, in which they failed to agree on a platform or new leaders (Muratli told us May 9 that the Congress would resume soon). Safeen Dizayee, head of the KDP's international bureau and former KDP representative in Ankara, told PolMilCouns and PolMilOff May 18 that the ITF's failed Congress hurt its credibility, and that it is facing many defections.

...Iraqi Turkmen Assembly: A Smile...

111. (C) The Iraqi Turkmen Assembly (ITA) told the Ambassador Feb. 4 that the organization seeks U.S. "recognition and protection." The Ambassador demurred, noting that as the Ambassador to Turkey he was in no position to do so, though the coalition is committed to protecting all Iraqis as individuals. In PolMilOff's May 10 meeting with ITA officials, they sought U.S. support for three initiatives in Kirkuk:

- A new international university with an English-language curriculum, also to include a teaching hospital and medical school;
- An industrial park "for middle class businesspeople and craftsmen;" and
- Provision of CF security for a pan-Turkmen "summit" this July or later "to reunite Turkmen at all levels."

112. (C) Our ITA interlocutors insisted that they oppose the ITF, and blamed ITF's poor election results on the party's close identification with Turkey. "We are Iraqis, not Turks," ITA Chairman Umit Akkoyunlu pointedly stated. Akkoyunlu was surprised when PolMilOff recalled that it was an ITF official who proposed the university idea to CODEL Hayes in Kirkuk (ref b). He replied that the head of the steering committee for the university concept in Kirkuk happens to be an ITF member but that it is not an ITF concept per se. PolMilOff encouraged ITA to discuss these issues with REO Kirkuk and/or Embassy Baghdad. Akkoyunlu later told PolMilOff on June 1 that Hacitepe University in Ankara had

agreed to enter into a partnership with this nascent university in Kirkuk.

¶13. (C) Akkoyunlu added that ITA wants to send a delegation to Washington to discuss these projects and present the ITA agenda to the USG. Subsequently, on June 1 Akkoyunlu told PolMilOff that he will be going to Iraq in about a month to launch the ITA in Iraq. He claimed the ITF in Iraq was "dissolving" and that ITA had already made links with Turkmen groups in Iraq.

¶14. (C) At least in Ankara, ITA presents a generally more agreeable image than ITF and certainly ITCAA. At the same time, Akkoyunlu characterized the Jan. 30 elections as "not democratic," and said the ITA would not run as a party in the next elections unless its concerns were met. He professed a desire to work with the Kurds and all other groups in Iraq, but accused the Kurdish leadership of overreaching and seeking to dominate Kirkuk.

Action Request

¶15. (C) We cannot evaluate the bona fides of the ITA, but we believe they are at least seeking to come to the table with ideas and--within limits--to be constructive. We have no insight into their popularity in Iraq. We were non-committal toward their request for assistance on certain projects in Kirkuk and trip to Washington, but we would be grateful to hear views from our colleagues in Iraq. End action request.

Turkey on the Turkmen

¶16. (C) Comment: Turkish government and press advocacy for Iraq's Turkmen waxes and wanes. During the current period of a positive shift in the GOT's Iraq policy, we hear fewer Turkish complaints about alleged Kurdish mistreatment of the Turkmen, though the future of Kirkuk remains a sensitive issue in Ankara. MFA Under Secretary Tuygan told the Ambassador after the election results were announced that a census in Iraq is vital in order to determine how many Iraqi Turkmen there really are (ref a). Turkish officials routinely tell us that they believe there are at least five million Iraqi Turkmen, but the poor election results for the ITF (only 93,000 votes) may have served as a wake-up call to Ankara.

¶17. (C) Comment cont.: Even with GOT criticism of the ITF's poor election showing, we see some indications that Ankara is distancing itself from the party. But distance does not equal disinterest. Turkey still sees the ITF as a means to exert political influence in Iraq, and ITF members provide intelligence (much of it false or exaggerated, we believe) on Kurdish activities to the Turks. We expect Turkey neither to choose another Turkman organization nor to completely abandon the ITF. Especially if unrest breaks out in Kirkuk, we can expect Turkey to pressure us to protect the Turkmen. In the meantime, Turkmen groups in Ankara will continue to spin out their narratives to the GOT, to us, and anyone else who will listen even as the real action takes place next door. End comment.

¶18. (U) Iraq posts minimize considered.

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